

Natchitoches

National Fish Hatchery

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



Karen Kilpatrick, Hatchery Manager
Natchitoches NFH
615 South Drive
Natchitoches, LA 71457
Phone: 318/352 5324
Fax: 318/352 8082
E-mail: karen_kilpatrick@fws.gov
Web: <http://natchitoches.fws.gov>

Hatchery Facts

- Established: 1930. Established under the authority of the White Act, 46 Statute 371, to produce largemouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill and catfish for local public waters and farm ponds.
- Acres: 98 land acres; 46 surface acres for fish production (53 ponds).
- Current programs involve restoration of interjurisdictional fishes (primarily paddlefish); recovery of the endangered pallid sturgeon; restoration of striped bass populations. Recreational species (largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish) are produced for management needs on federal lands.
- Acres: 98 land acres; 46 surface acres for fish production (53 ponds).
- Only Federal fish hatchery in the state of Louisiana.

Hatchery Objectives

- Restore depleted populations of striped bass.
- Develop spawning and culture techniques for the endangered pallid sturgeon.
- Develop and improve spawning and culture techniques for the paddlefish.
- Develop environmental education programs that promote the Service's mission and utilize hatchery facilities as an outdoor classroom for all Natchitoches Parish schools.

Financial Impact of Hatchery

- Seven-person staff.
- Current year budget (FY 04) \$632,806.

Management Tools

- Five intensive culture systems for spawning and holding species of special concern.

- Fifty-three ponds for extensive culture of a variety of species.
- Four in-pond raceways for the culture of anadromous and/or freshwater riverine species.
- Cooperative work efforts with the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA); Gulf Coast Marine Fisheries Commission; the Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Team; and the natural resources divisions of the states of Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas and Alabama.

Natural History

- Produce between 250,000 to 500,000 striped bass fingerlings annually.
- Spawn approximately 500,000 paddlefish fry annually with distribution of fry to the states of Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi.
- Provide 8" to 10" paddlefish (up to 20,000) annually as part of a five year study coordinated by MICRA (all fish are tagged with coded wire tags).
- Spawn and culture the endangered pallid sturgeon.
- Enhance aquatic habitat restoration efforts in the Red River Valley through private lands projects in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.
- Provide recreational fishing species (largemouth bass, bluegill and catfish) to refuges in the Service's Lower Mississippi River Ecosystem.

Public Use Opportunities

- 30,000 visitors annually.
- 9,000 gallon, 16 tank public aquarium featuring native southeastern fish and reptiles.
- K-12 environmental education programs using hatchery as an outdoor classroom.

Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

- Harold B. Wales Environmental Education Building.
- Purple martin viewing complex.
- Wood duck viewing program.
- Birdwatching.

Questions and Answers

What is a fish hatchery?

Federal fish hatcheries have been part of our nation's resource management efforts for more than 100 years. Hatcheries can be warm water, cool water or cold water facilities. Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery is a warm water station that spawns, hatches, and raises young fish to a size and age which provides them with the best chance of surviving in the wild. These fish are raised to help sustain populations in the wild until suitable habitat can be reestablished and the populations can sustain themselves.

What kind of fish do you raise?

Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery raises six species of fish. We work with striped bass, paddlefish, pallid sturgeon, largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. The bass, bluegill and catfish are raised to promote recreational fishing on national wildlife refuges. The striped bass and paddlefish are raised to restore depleted populations of these species in the Lower Mississippi River Basin. The pallid sturgeon are raised as part of the National Recovery Plan because they are an endangered species.

Isn't the paddlefish a catfish?

Because of their smooth skin paddlefish are often mistaken for a species of catfish. They are nicknamed spoonbilled catfish even though they are not related to any catfish species.

Do you sell fish to private land owners?

Although once a function of the National Fish Hatchery system, "farm pond" stocking is no longer considered a Federal responsibility. In addition to the shift in responsibility, enough private aquaculturists began raising farm pond species that free stockings were affecting business.

In 1989 the Fish and Wildlife Service officially ended the Farm Pond Program. Now individuals can contact the hatchery office to obtain a listing of local and statewide fish farmers who can provide fish for their farm ponds.

What do sturgeon eat?

The pallid sturgeon prefers extremely turbid waters and strong currents where they feed on insects and small fish. The pallid is listed as an endangered species and faces many of the same problems as the paddlefish (another species raised at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery): contaminants from agriculture and industrial runoff and habitat destruction.